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SUBJECT: RESCHEDULING PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS: BIPARTISAN
SUCCESS

REF: 07 MAPUTO 899

11. SUMMARY: Mozambique's first provincial elections have been postponed; a new date has not yet been set but elections may be held in conjunction with national Presidential and Assembly elections in November 2009. In a show of pragmatic cooperation, ruling party FRELIMO and the major opposition coalition led by RENAMO worked together to postpone the date of the elections and are jointly monitoring the renewed national voter registration efforts. The demonstrated ability of RENAMO and FRELIMO to work together in the National Assembly, a rare occurrence, is a positive step.
END SUMMARY.

PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS TWICE POSTPONED

12. Mozambique was scheduled to hold three national elections in three consecutive years - provincial in December 2007, municipal in November 2008 and national (President and Assembly) in November 2009. The provincial elections were initially scheduled for December 20, 2007, coinciding with the Muslim holy day Eid (reftel). President Guebuza, stating that he did not wish to disenfranchise the significant Muslim population of Mozambique, postponed the vote to January 16, the last possible date that conformed to Mozambique's constitutional requirements on elections.

13. Since January is the middle of the rainy season and many roads become impassable due to flooding, leaders from both parties raised concerns about access to polling places and slower-than-expected national voter registration. In December, the Assembly of the Republic (AR) exercised its constitutional authority and postponed the provincial vote to no later than the end of 2009. This action proved prescient when flooding and heavy rainfall in January made access to many parts of the country nearly impossible.

PROVINCIAL ELECTION MAY BE COMBINED WITH OTHER ELECTIONS

14. Political observers told Poloff that FRELIMO and RENAMO have different preferences for the new date of the provincial elections: FRELIMO favors combining the provincial and national elections as its constituents are more likely to turn out to vote in the national election while RENAMO prefers a combination of provincial and municipal elections, reflecting its belief that its power base lies in the countryside, where people are more likely to vote when local candidates are also to be chosen. The President, acting on the advice of the independent electoral commission (CNE), will determine and announce the date of the provincial election later this year.

COMMENT: BIPARTISANSHIP RETURNS?

15. COMMENT: Since President Guebuza, who is also the leader of the FRELIMO party, will decide when to hold the provincial elections, it is most likely that the provincial and national elections will be combined and held in November 2009. Publicly the President may, with some justification, point to the need for sufficient time for preparations. Nonetheless, the cooperation exhibited by FRELIMO and RENAMO in rescheduling the election and jointly overseeing voter registration is encouraging. Although FRELIMO controls the national government and most of the local governments, the party does not have enough of a majority in the AR to constitutionally reschedule the election without cooperation from RENAMO. This positive experience in mutual cooperation could be a template for future political solutions to differences between the parties. END COMMENT.
Chapman